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Many programs for the culturally deprived emphasize special techniques in reading instruction. Among these techniques are smaller classes, audio-visual materials, and library books. The content of primers is even further from the experience and interests of the disadvantaged child than for the average child. Although studies indicate the importance of libraries in reading instruction, few school systems are adequately improving library collections and services. The elementary school library can provide materials of greater interest to the child which can help him extend his speaking and reading vocabulary. The importance of a picture book collection is also emphasized, particularly in reading-readiness programs for the culturally deprived. After the child begins to read, he can be encouraged through displays and exhibits.

The contribution which an elementary school library can make to the education of the culturally deprived child depends on the quality of the library. Indications are that school libraries in large urban school systems are far below the standards of the American Association of School Librarians. Although there are differences among systems, many are without centralized libraries, and all have less books and expenditures per student than the national average. Because of greater problems, urban areas are spending less money on library services. Effective library services are vital to programs for culturally deprived children.

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School Library Services for the Culturally Deprived Child

RICHARD L. DARLING

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School Library Services for the Culturally Deprived Child

RICHARD L. DARLING

MANY SCHOOL SYSTEMS have concentrated their effort on improving the culturally deprived child's opportunities to learn on reading instruction. For children who are failing in the regular reading program, they provide remedial reading programs in smaller than usual classes, using special materials—often library books, rather than the prescribed text, and audiovisual materials—selected to meet individual needs and interests. These programs emphasize the use of appropriate materials.

In a recent article on children's reading choices, Ruth C. Smith reports from her research that there is little relationship between the story content of preprimers and primers and children's reading interests as shown in their selection of library books.[1] For the culturally deprived child the content of standard readers may be even more unrelated to his experiences than it is for the average child. Not only may the material lack story interest, but it often uses words and describes environment that are foreign to the child's experience. Teachers working with children from culturally deprived homes report that many of the reading difficulties of these children stem from poor vocabularies. They find that such children are unfamiliar with the words used in beginning readers. Some school systems postpone formal reading instruction for these children until they can acquire an adequate and acceptable speaking vocabulary through special instruction. Other systems, Detroit's for one, have prepared their own primers in an experiment to determine whether culturally deprived children learn to read better using materials which reflect their own backgrounds.[2]

Although school systems recognize the difficulty that culturally deprived children have in using standard materials, few of them are giving adequate attention to providing suitable materials for improving elementary school library collections and services. Yet recent studies and reports emphasize the importance of elementary school libraries and materials in reading instruction. The 1960 White House Conference on Children and Youth, for instance, recommended that programs of instruction be provided for slow-learning children and that these programs include adequate and suitable instructional materials and libraries.[3] According to the recent report, *Learning To Read*, meager libraries and insufficient books are among the reasons why the teaching of reading is sometimes poor.[4] The same report recommends that "boards of education see to it that there is a bountiful supply of suitable books in the school libraries and primary classrooms," so that reading instruction will not be confined to basic readers.[5]

Writing specifically about the educational problems of children from economically deprived neighborhoods, Patricia Cayo Sexton stresses the importance of the school library as a focal point of the school. She suggests that the part of the curriculum that most needs adjusting to meet the requirements of children from lower income families is reading instruction. She recommends that adjustments include ways of encouraging children to pursue their natural interest in reading.[6]

The elementary school library can offer valuable services to an improved reading program for the culturally deprived child. By providing reading materials of greater interest than textbooks to the child, it can help the child extend his speaking and reading vocabulary. The library with a collection representing a wide variety of subjects can satisfy the interest of every child. A good picture book collection is particularly valuable. Picture books have long been used in reading readiness programs, but many more of them should be available for use in programs for culturally deprived children than for other children. Books with appealing illustrations and brief and simple text can be read aloud by librarians and teachers to introduce new ideas and objects and their names to children. The school librarian can read picture story books to children not yet able to read, and can encourage them to select books in the library to take to their classrooms for the teacher to read to the class or to small groups (the teacher can encourage discussion of new ideas in the books related to the children's experience). The library can supplement books with filmstrips and films, story-

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[1] Ruth C. Smith, "Children's Reading Choices and Basic Reader Content," *Elementary English*, XXXIX (March 1962), pp. 202–209.

[2] "New Detroit Primer Stirs National Interest," *Michigan Education Journal*, XL (Nov. 1, 1962), p. 244.

[3] Recommendations: Composite Reports of Forum Findings, Golden Anniversary White House Conference on Children and Youth, Mar. 27–Apr. 2, 1960, Washington, D.C., Washington, U.S. Government Printing Office, 1960, pp. 23–24.

[4] Learning To Read: A Report of a Conference of Reading Experts, Princeton, N.J., Educational Testing Service (1962), p. 4.

[5] Op. cit., p. 11.

[6] Patricia Cayo Sexton, Education and Income: Inequalities of Opportunity in Our Public Schools, New York, The Viking Press, 1961, p. 259.

telling by the librarian, and recordings from its collection. A library with a collection representing a wide variety of subjects can satisfy the interest of each child and can encourage the child to find new interests.

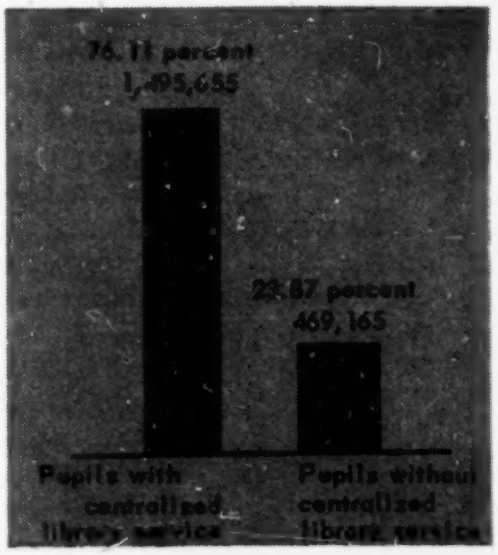
After the culturally deprived child begins to read, the school library can provide him with vital help to progress through library books and other materials as he pursues his own interests. It can assist the teacher in guiding children to materials appropriate in content and difficulty and in relating the materials to the instructional program, and can encourage children to read through displays and exhibits of books and other materials which are related to subjects of interest to the children the library is trying to serve.

The contribution that an elementary school library can make to the education of culturally deprived children depends on the quality of the library. Are elementary school libraries in our large cities—where culturally deprived children are concentrated—meeting library standards? Indications are that they are not. The standards for school libraries set by the American Association of School Librarians,[7] prepared with the cooperation of 19 other national organizations, recommend a minimum library book collection of 6,000 to 10,000 volumes for schools with 200 to 999 pupils, and 10 books for each pupil for larger schools. They also recommend an annual expenditure of $4 to $6 for each pupil. Information from the 1960–61 school year obtained by the Office of Education for its survey, *Statistics of Public School Libraries, 1960–61*, now in preparation, for the school systems of 10 large cities with a population of 500,000 or more indicates that provisions for school libraries in these large urban school systems are far below the standards of the American Association of School Librarians. The 3 graphs opposite show the percentage of elementary school children served by centralized libraries, the average number of volumes for each pupil in centralized libraries, and the average expenditure for each pupil for library books in the 10 cities during 1960–61, in relation to the standards of the association.

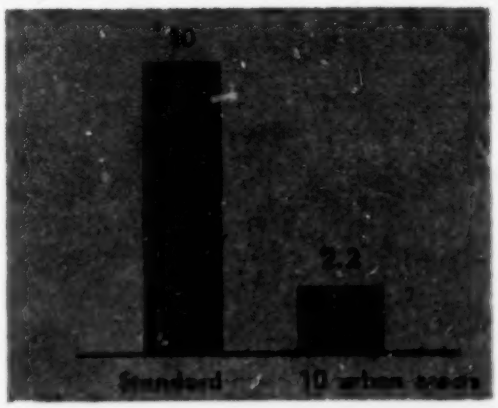
There were, however, great differences between the elementary school libraries provided by the different school systems covered by the study. Only one system provided centralized school library service to all of its elementary school pupils, two had centralized libraries for less than 10 percent of their pupils, and one had no centralized elementary school libraries. In school systems with centralized libraries in at least some of their schools, two had less than one book for each pupil. Only one city had more than five books for each pupil in its centralized school libraries, and it provided centralized school libraries for only 18.14 percent of its elementary school pupils. The expenditure for each pupil ranged from 10 cents for each pupil to $1.83 for each pupil, but only two school systems spent more than $1 for each pupil for library books. Three spent less than 15 cents for each pupil.

The American Association of School Librarians recommends that school systems have 1 librarian for every 300 pupils for the first 900, and 1 librarian for each additional 400 pupils. An Office of Education survey[8] of school library services for the 1958–59 school year reports that school systems with 25,000 or more pupils had 1 librarian for each 2,904 pupils in elementary schools with centralized libraries at that time. In all school systems with 150 or more pupils, the ratio was 1 librarian to 2,248 pupils in elementary schools with centralized libraries.

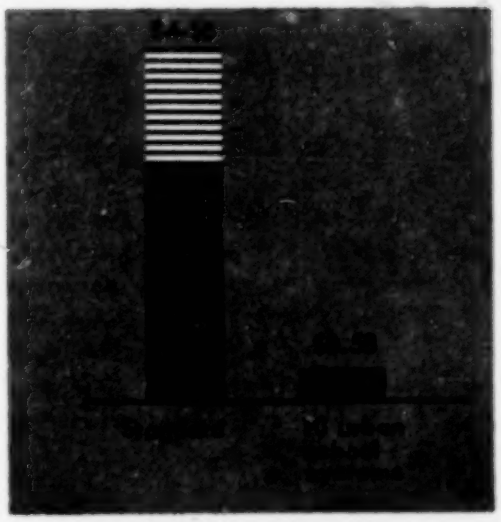
In 10 urban school systems with enrollments of 50,000 and over—



Almost one-fourth of the elementary school pupils were without centralized library services



Centralized elementary school libraries provided only 2.2 books per pupil, far below the recommended 10



The expenditures per pupil for library books averaged only 58 cents, far below the recommended $4 to $6.

[7] American Association of School Librarians, *Standards for School Library Programs*, Chicago, American Library Association, 1960.

[8] Mary Helen Mahar and Doris C. Holladay, *Public School Library Statistics, 1958–59*, Washington, D.C., U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, Office of Education, 1960.

From these figures we know that elementary school libraries in large urban school systems are far below recognized standards and that they are below the level of centralized school libraries in the Nation as a whole. With greater problems, partly because of the needs of culturally deprived children, than schools in smaller centers, these school systems are spending less money on library books and have fewer books per pupil and fewer librarians per pupil.

Though there is no single solution to the educational problems of culturally deprived children, effective elementary school library service is vital to programs for these pupils. Urban school systems need to develop plans for expanding their library programs, providing specialized materials, and employing sufficient numbers of school librarians to administer library programs. Good elementary school library service will cost money. If, as educators have said, the most important breakthrough in education for culturally different children is achievement in reading, the cost for school library services will be small in proportion to possible results.